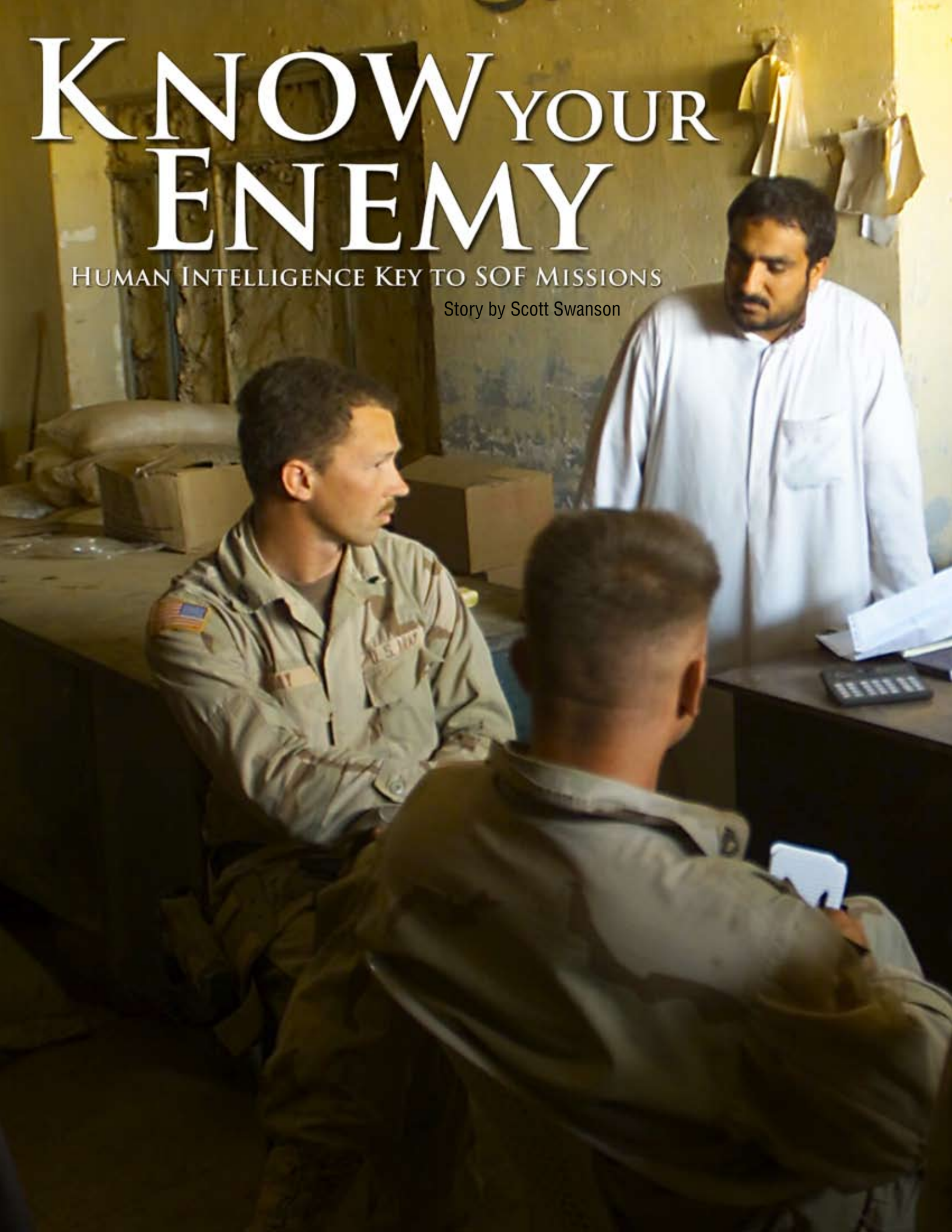


# KNOW YOUR ENEMY

HUMAN INTELLIGENCE KEY TO SOF MISSIONS

Story by Scott Swanson





THE AIM OF INTELLIGENCE IS TO FORECAST WHAT A TERRORIST CAN DO, WHERE AND HOW HE WILL DO IT AND AT WHAT TIME AND IN WHAT STRENGTH. IT IS CONCERNED WITH THE ENEMY AND ALL THEIR ACTIVITIES. IF IT IS ACCURATE AND TIMELY, IT WILL REDUCE THE RISKS IN PLANNED OPERATIONS, INCREASE THE NUMBER OF "KILLS," THWART THE TERRORIST IN HIS PLANS, AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY UPSET HIM.

—PRINCIPLES OF INTELLIGENCE, RHODESIAN INTELLIGENCE CORPS



In this “new era” of extremist Islamic elements, how much more do we know about that enemy than we did five years ago? Even with our experiences in Vietnam, El Salvador, the Balkans and the Middle East, how well-prepared are we to fight today’s unconventional wars? With an increase of asymmetrical conflicts in which belligerents take full advantage of their own strengths and the weaknesses of their more powerful adversaries, why do intelligence models fail to provide the actionable insights needed for locating and defeating such armed elements? In Iraq, for example, those fighting American forces include a complex mix of Sunni tribal militias, former regime members, foreign and domestic jihadists, Shiite militias and criminal gangs. Each group has different motivations and ways of fighting, but most commentary categorizes them as Iraqi insurgents, fundamentalists, Arabs or al-Qaeda, and there is apparently no unique means of successfully identifying their members.

## NOT SO OBVIOUS

To many, though, it sounds as if a solution should be quite straightforward — you simply must know your enemy. Numerous articles, books and e-mail signatures cite Sun Tzu’s “Know your enemy and you have won the battle.” That is apparently all there is to it. Oddly enough, very few who cite this sage advice ever explain how to know one’s adversary or how to collect the deep intelligence needed. Usually, there is some mention of culture, social knowledge and proper communication, but there are few illustrations or techniques.

Some academics and strategists claim that such knowledge of the enemy can provide a framework for profiling the organizational and operational tendencies of these armed groups to learn their strengths and weaknesses. But how does someone actually obtain these insights and make sense of them? And how do special-warfare elements at the forefront of these unconventional asymmetrical conflicts collect the appropriate intelligence as it pertains to special-operations forces or the cultural aspects of that collection?

In *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy*, B. Hugh Tovar states, “Intelligence is to special operations — any type of special operations — as water is to fish. The one is unthinkable without the other.” Special operations entail intelligence that is more complex and detailed in assessing the degree of risk, techniques, modes of employment and indigenous considerations than intelligence for conventional operations. The information is used to plan and rehearse operations, but the need for intelligence continues throughout the mission — to ensure continued mission feasibility and to predict changes in enemy capability, critical vulnerabilities and centers of gravity.

A target intelligence package, an area study, an operational net assessment and, if there is time, a Psychological

Operations or Civil Affairs assessment, will provide some of the needed information. But to truly understand an enemy and the means necessary to obtain intelligence about such an adversary in asymmetrical and asynchronous encounters, elements of special-operations forces, or SOF, need to re-embrace the role of social/political adviser or develop additional skills and deeper cultural insights, so that they can obtain the necessary information from locals and detainees.

## PROJECTS VS. PROGRAMS

The type of skills and deeper cultural bridging needed to gain additional insights into the adversaries’ centers of gravity and the development of collector skills depends largely on two types of intelligence collection: initiative-based and program-based.

Initiative-based intelligence collection is a more on-off type operation. It typically involves fewer resources, has greater time sensitivity, has potentially high covert or clandestine attributes, and is a substitute for or precursor to a larger intelligence-collection program. It is smaller scale and geared toward short-term, “quick hit” results. Initiative-based collection includes opportune collections, such as screenings, walk-ins, spot reports and post-targeting exploitation of detainees. Unfortunately, because these sources of information have been acquired quickly and through situational opportunities, the reliability of the information is often in question.

Program-based intelligence collection is loosely defined as a situation in which the U.S. supports a series of operational activities for a specified period of time through resources and formal infrastructure. For example, during the mid-1960s, a CIA “intellocrat” officer on detached duty with the National Security Council, Robert W. Komer, helped to build a Vietnam-pacification program to collect information on suspected Viet Cong who could then be neutralized. The project concept, which stemmed from the Special Forces Civilian Irregular Defense Group and a smaller hamlet-level intelligence-collection initiative, later grew to the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Developments Staff Program, emerged into the Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation Program, and later became the more-renowned Phoenix Program, with interrogation centers in every one of South Vietnam’s 235 districts and 44 provinces. The program was supported by roughly 500,000 local militia troops, about 600 Americans (20 to 40 State Department and CIA specialists), and 50- to 100-man strike forces of the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit. During the Reagan administration, the U.S. conducted a similar program in El Salvador, but on a smaller scale, to support nationalist forces by pacifying rebel leaders and sympathizers.

The medium-to-large-scale operations of program-based collection will often use a unified structure to com-





**MEET AND GREET** A Civil Affairs team meets with an Iraqi family. Getting to know members of the local population and building a rapport with them is a key to success. *U.S. Army photo.*

bine military forces, local law enforcement, civil programs and other enemy-pacification efforts. Ideally, that coordinated activity will establish government-wide programs that will improve the lives of the people and build their loyalty and support for operations against the adversary's infrastructure. Coordinated activity also reduces compartmentalization of information and keeps different groups from utilizing the same individuals. Locals must be involved to do most of the work to reduce the enemy's capabilities and presence among the population; to overtly target the hostile infrastructure as part of a security program and to reduce the fear of a secret police activity aimed at civilians; and to develop a legal framework for conducting such activities in accordance with local laws and customs. The host nation has to be committed to providing programs or institutions to meet the population's needs. This is critical for the U.S. in developing an exit strategy that will allow it to leave and not appear to have colonialist intentions. Intelligence activities can be maintained through constant local presence and improved by leveraging local experience and knowledge to communicate with the people. Interviewees feel more comfortable and tend to talk more freely when the topics are familiar.

Using the collected information, SOF activities can be focused against local cells that are responsible for political

propaganda, finance and supply, information and culture, social welfare and recruiting from the population. Contrary to popular belief, counterinsurgency and counterterror operations usually require a minimal application of force to overcome the adversary, for whom the population serves as a human shield (whether actively or passively). Soldiers and law-enforcement personnel must learn to overcome the temptation to conduct seek-and-destroy actions or to concentrate overwhelming fire on the enemy among civilian populations. The local infrastructure, in tandem with the operational components, can foster a more trustful intelligence-gathering environment by showing the locals that life is improving because of the efforts of the government and the presence of U.S. military advisers.

In Vietnam, the Marine Combined Action Platoons used Marines and Navy corpsmen who lived with the Vietnamese people, learning their cultural idiosyncrasies, becoming immersed in their culture and, most importantly, gaining their trust. The program achieved immediate success in intelligence support. The locals broke their silence and gave intelligence leads once they decided to rid their villages of guerillas and to protect their new American friends. In similar initiatives today, by living in the villages, SOF could provide CIDG-like training to their host-nation counterparts.



**PAYING ATTENTION** Even though a listener may understand the words, understanding their true meaning will depend upon how well the listener understands the speaker's society and position in it. *U.S. Army photo.*

## MISSING NIRVANA, MEETING SUN TZU

In a perfect world, the intelligence-collection program would support a local regime that has a history of inflicting few or no political and social injustices on the populace, and trust-building would be less of a challenge. In reality, however, SOF units must often execute intelligence-collection operations within areas in which communities are oppressed by corrupt or inept government leadership. In such environments, it is especially difficult to collect intelligence: Rapport-building must begin immediately, and there is a high threat to the security of the collectors and the population. Many of today's hot spots are not conducive to sitting down with an individual for a relaxed tea and dinner. In these cases, it is going to require taking a step back to understand what Sun Tzu's *Art of War* really means about determining who the enemy really is.

*If you know the enemy and yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself and not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither yourself nor the enemy, you will succumb in every battle.*

Direct understanding of the words is pretty easy, but to really understand the meaning, a bit of psychology is required. When collectors can comprehend the underlying causes of why humans in a particular culture and social sys-

tem act the way they do, there is a good possibility that they can anticipate how people will react in various circumstances.

Observable factors can be combined with analysis based on intelligence models and psychological tools. Behavior is governed by laws, standards, socialization, rules and codes, which means it can be predicted in similar situations. But to best interpret an adversary and his behavior, one must understand one's own behavior, feelings, self-concept, self-esteem and fears. Our perceptions of others are a set of norms we apply to social categories such as leadership, gender and culture. It is often hard to step outside our perceptions of others and see them as they see themselves.

Using Sun Tzu as a starting point, if we really understand our own pre-judgments, then we can start viewing the enemy as he really is. Cultural aspects of right vs. wrong or evil vs. good make a difference in communications and in comprehension. The key to leveraging the social factors will be to move beyond the visible manifestations of people's intentions and delve into the inner origination of their perceptions. Collectors who can shift rapidly from their observations of basic differences to seeing the key differences and sensing their likely effects will fare better than those stuck in a cultural blind-spot.

Basic listening occurs on four levels, according to Claus

Otto Scharmer of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The first type of listening is *downloading* — listening by reconfirming habitual judgments. This type of listening occurs when almost everything that happens confirms what the collector knows or can observe. The second type of listening is *objective* or *attentive listening* — listening by paying attention to disconfirming data. In this type of listening, a collector pays attention to what differs from what is already known. He processes highlights about a reality that differs from his own understanding, rather than denying them. Objective listening is the basic mode of asking good questions and carefully observing the responses given.

The third level of listening is *empathic listening*, in which the place from which our listening originates shifts to the place from which the other person is speaking, because we connect directly with the other person. At this level, a collector can almost feel what another person wants to say before the words take form and may recognize whether or not a person chooses the right word to express something. That judgment is difficult for collectors

teraction? The informant's level of energy, situation, work, social role or phase of life may alter his behavior, but the core desire usually remains the same. Translating across different cultures makes the difference between understanding critical aspects of information that can be used in tactical operations and missing them.

## TRAITS

SOF information collectors who have a general knowledge of Meyers-Briggs Type Indicators can fall into the trap of categorizing individuals as extroverted or introverted, and observing that one need only listen to extroverts to gain information, and that introverts require someone to ask them specifically about information. It is true that most extroverted action is reflected in outward behavior that is fairly easy to observe; however, introverts have as much action going on, but on the inside, where it is not as apparent to the observer. The easiest way to see through the introvert's illusion of calmness is to observe the physiological and behavioral forms that often transcend cultural roots.

**“Intelligence is to special operations — any type of special operations — as water is to fish. The one is unthinkable without the other.”**

who have less-than-fluent language skills or must rely on translators.

The fourth level is *generative listening*. At this level, the collector, through his understanding of the situation and belief structure, is able to “read” the individual. At this level, the information that the person and the collector are sharing falls into place with the knowledge that would logically correlate to their social bearing and position within the society. The collector will understand whether the individual would be likely to possess the information or to share it truthfully. For most collectors, getting to this stage requires either an intimate knowledge of the people or significant background intelligence.

In cultures that focus on the meanings conveyed non-verbally, communications tend to be informing. In cultures in which most meaning is conveyed verbally, communications tend to be directing. Power/distance relationships are also an important communication factor in cultures in which persons with more authority or higher status are seen as more directive than those with less authority and lower status. As a result, interaction with individuals of those cultures will require an interviewer or interrogator to change his behavior for maximum results. In these situations, it is critical to learn not only how someone is doing something but also why — what do they want out of the in-

Extroverts will likely demonstrate more obvious changes in their interactions, whereas introverts may be less obvious. SOF collection “teaming” comes into play here, as one member can initiate conversation while another keeps a slight distance from the interaction to observe the personality dynamics.

### **Physiologically, stress yields symptoms of:**

- Increased adrenaline, heart rate, blood pressure (blushing).
- Dry mouth.
- Perspiration.
- Pupil dilation.
- Capillary constriction.

### **Behaviorally, stress yields symptoms of:**

- Withdrawal from social interaction.
- Nervousness, trembling hands, mumbling, hesitation in actions and speech.
- Anger or attack.
- Age regression.
- Moodiness.
- Apathy or change of the conversation/topic.

## GRASPING DYNAMICS OF SOCIETY

So far, our discussion has assumed that the SOF element will have an opportunity to speak one-on-one with a



|             |                                      | Personality Type   |  |  |   |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
|             |                                      | In-charge<br><i>Fast paced</i>   | Planner<br><i>Analytical<br/>Processor</i>   | Collaborator<br><i>Consensus builder<br/>Sensitive</i>   | Laid-back<br><i>Behind the scenes</i>   |
| Interaction | Greeting                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief and cordial opening</li> <li>• Fast pace</li> <li>• Speak in strong voice</li> <li>• Show confidence</li> <li>• State directly why you are there</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief opening</li> <li>• Intermittent eye contact</li> <li>• Casual yet erect posture</li> <li>• Keep a distance and don't invade their space</li> <li>• State why you are there</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a warm voice tone</li> <li>• Be expressive</li> <li>• Make personal comments</li> <li>• Make eye contact</li> <li>• Be energetic and even jovial</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet friendly tone</li> <li>• Disclose something about yourself</li> <li>• Try low-key connecting with some eye contact</li> <li>• Slow calm pace</li> </ul>              |
|             | Getting Information                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask directly</li> <li>• Be matter-of-fact</li> <li>• Don't be too personal</li> <li>• They may want to know why you need the information</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit small talk</li> <li>• Be matter-of-fact and less personal</li> <li>• Pause</li> <li>• Don't interrupt</li> <li>• Step back a little</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be prepared to listen</li> <li>• Be very responsive verbally and nonverbally</li> <li>• Speak with an upward inflection</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't rush them</li> <li>• Don't interrupt</li> <li>• Take pauses</li> <li>• Use head nods and affirm</li> <li>• Speak with upward inflection</li> </ul>                   |
|             | Getting Feedback or Asking Questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't digress, yet stay friendly</li> <li>• They are not likely to accept roadblocks to what they are asking</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't rush them</li> <li>• Reflect back to them what you hear</li> <li>• Don't interrupt</li> <li>• Use active listening</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow them to digress and ramble as they think aloud</li> <li>• Acknowledge and encourage them to share</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't finish their thoughts and sentences</li> <li>• Reflect back to them what you heard</li> <li>• Answer questions honestly for them</li> <li>• Be supportive</li> </ul> |
|             | Ending                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convey a sense of composure</li> <li>• Assure them that things are under control</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convey a sense that things are on track and under control</li> <li>• Be brief yet assuring</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show warmth</li> <li>• Gently close the conversation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use caring and gentle friendliness</li> <li>• Gently close the conversation</li> </ul>   |

person. From an information-collection standpoint, group dynamics pose a challenge. Understanding group dynamics enables a collector to look more deeply into four areas: *group polarization* — expressing more extreme views as a member of a group than as an individual; *social facilitation* — acting differently when other people are watching; *bystander effect* — diffusing responsibility when large groups of people are around; and *conformity* — following the behavior of a group. If the group dynamics cannot be changed, then collectors should at least note the atmospherics in order to convey the context within which information was gathered and the credence that it should be given.

When collectors are also the analysts, they must temper their social cognition to reduce their personal biases in interpreting and understanding social events. For example, a collector observes during an interview that the subject is edgy, nervous, perspiring and will not make eye

contact. For some, especially those trained in dealing with Arabs and who know their tendency to stand close while staring into the other person's eyes, the body language and observable physiological responses of the subject indicate that he is lying. As a result, he may be put through grueling interrogation.

But it is important to note that in some cultures, it is a sign of respect not to look persons of authority in the eye. Such was often the case in Vietnam, and inexperienced collectors sometimes overreacted to subjects who showed body language that they interpreted as deceit. The stressful situation alone could warrant nervousness and perspiration. It could also be that the adversary-in-hiding threatened to punish the subject (or his family members) if he shares any details about the adversary's activities. Pushing the individual harder may not yield more information or a confession, and the interrogator's over-aggressive approach could make the subject more sympathetic to the



**ON THE TABLE** Soldiers meet with local Iraqi leaders to gather information and to build relationships. *U.S. Army photo.*

adversary's cause.

The power of influence changes based on changing individual or group needs, immediate priorities and individual or collective experiences. Pressure and tactical actions are created for different situations, but they may also produce reactions not initially considered. Overall, there are about 50 observed tactics of influence, which largely stem from about 16 core techniques. Each of the tactics will create a correlating result, based on overriding needs. The order of Maslow's hierarchy of needs changes according to the social culture of a people, and the hierarchy is unfortunately not written on a prominent sign posted at the country's border. The hierarchy must be researched and discovered.

## SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

One of the most productive means of obtaining information from an individual, either individually or in a group setting, is to shift perspectives and communication styles to match the other person's. During the first interaction, greetings set the tone. They are the initial means of demonstrating empathy and moving toward true cooperation. The difficulty of gathering information will be determined by a personality style's natural resistance to giving information or by the group surroundings. Similarly, the way a person gives explanations and answers will be related to whether the individual listens and understands and is in a position to share openly. Ending a meet-and-greet creates the last

impression, which is often as important as the first.

These considerations are for general personality traits. Cultural norms will override many aspects of the social etiquette, especially in group settings. While questioning may be impolite in a social setting, the emphasis of cultural understanding is to avoid inappropriate behavior. This all changes when risk is high and lives are under an eminent threat. When in doubt, it is best to resort to conversational questioning techniques with a polite-yet-authoritative tone that is direct and purposeful in order to detect intentions and mitigate such threats.

A key variable in any situation is the perception of comfort by those being interviewed for information. Effective interviewers can set the tone for eliciting the necessary information by knowing, understanding and attempting to satisfy the emotional needs that motivate human activity. The lead stress factor will be the individual's perception of the threat from the SOF interviewer. That stress will lead to two other factors: the perceived susceptibility to the risk of the adversarial element taking a more active affect upon the individual's life, and the perceived severity of consequences, in the form of fear or social repercussions, from the adversary's increasing strength. Second in importance to the perceived threat is the perceived benefit. This is the individual's belief that the information he shares will help to improve the situation.



Perceived barriers are the degree to which the individual will share information and the consequences that may result from informing. Cues to action are situations or events that will cause the individual to change his perceptions and become motivated to share information. Finally, self-efficacy is the subject's perception of his ability to execute the behavior and action necessary to create the desired outcome.

It will shift the odds in favor of SOF information-collectors if they have a realistic understanding of the plight individuals face and the improvement that SOF can offer. Key in this regard are the individual's actual needs, not the needs the SOF interviewer perceives. The SOF interviewer must be able to personalize the risks and risk-levels to the population, based on the individual's or group's behavior; specify the consequences of the risk and conditions that could worsen; define actions the people must take and the expected effects; motivate and assist the populace to reduce barriers to information-sharing; and instruct the people in safe methods of providing information.

### INFORMATION, INTELLIGENCE AND INSIGHTS

When the SOF element has gained the trust of the people or learned to read between the lines of a society, the element can then follow a systematic way of "profiling" specific armed groups that are pertinent to the element's missions. Most guides are a "laundry list" of the generic elements of insurgency movements — leadership, organization and networks, popular support, ideology, activities and foreign support. The profiling methodology should assess and categorize the potential for inappropriate, harmful, criminal or terrorist behavior. That analysis should be blended with any historic actions of the adversary and the adversary's perceived capabilities and evolution.

Studying historical acts of aggression can yield clues that would help analysts identify developing situations from the reports of these individuals. Through planning and pre-defined scenarios, we can use insights on unfolding events to protect locations or areas of influence. Collectors can obtain intelligence from witnesses by avoiding unnecessary direct confrontation; by skillful use of open and closed questions; by keeping questions simple, avoiding ambiguously-worded questions and using leading questions properly; by having the confidence to ask tough questions, to pursue unanswered questions and to assume that more information is available.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Insurgent conflicts and terrorist acts equate to war. Wars are based on psychological, socio-cultural and geo-

political drivers. Resolution of asymmetrical and unconventional wars has historically been based on finding, capturing or killing terrorist and militia leaders. All these actions are fostered by intelligence that targets components of those drivers. Special Forces operations require extensive planning and preparation, of which intelligence is an intrinsic component. Intelligence can be used to understand current social, political and tactical patterns; to predict events; and to mitigate threats to SOF. If resource conflicts and other priorities override the strategic importance of intelligence in planning, the battle may be lost before it is fought. SOF commanders have a daunting task: to balance all that is required for planning and creating not only their own vision of the battlefield but also the adversary's vision. This may mean reducing tunnel vision in order to gain a larger picture. It also means that the commander must clearly identify his priority intelligence requirements so that intelligence resources can provide the type and amount of intelligence needed to direct the operation.

Assembling necessary intelligence or conducting collection in areas with different cultures and languages requires Soldiers to ask for more help, tools, techniques or time. Resisting unrealistic requirements is not weakness or insubordination but rather feedback from intelligence specialists who know their profession. When resistance is not possible, younger members may have to step up for the post-mission debrief assessments, area research and anthropological insights. Knowing one's own weaknesses and the components of the adversary will indeed grant the victory through a thorough understanding of both parties. At the very least, it will provide the insight required. You can better "free the oppressed" when you know what the people believe is oppressing them most. **SW**

**Scott Swanson** is a specialist in urban warfare and socio-cultural intelligence and a contributor to Army military intelligence and to the Special Operations Forces University. As chief desk officer for Delphi International Research's Joshua Group-Fox Unit ([www.sofg2.us](http://www.sofg2.us)), he has provided assistance to the Department of State and to intelligence, to operational elements and to special projects within the Department of Defense. He is also a special adviser to academic-intelligence programs in covert action, propaganda and international economics. He holds a bachelor's degree in culture and communication (Arabic, French and Spanish-language study) and a master of science in strategic intelligence. Swanson can be reached at [scott.swanson7@us.army.mil](mailto:scott.swanson7@us.army.mil).